Such (dye-)stuff as dreams are made on. Material interactions between the photography, film, and fashion industries

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Such (Dye-)Stuff as Dreams Are Made On

Material Interactions between the Photography, Film, and Fashion Industries

Olivia Kristina Stutz

The "Dream Factory" is a common name for Hollywood and the American film industry, where collective dreams are systematically woven into cinematic fabrics in a process akin to mass production. Consequently, the term "dream factory" is not only a metaphor for the fabrication of dreams on a symbolic and narrative level but also extends to the material parameters—determined by the media and the technical resources employed—that condition the creation of such "stuff." Yet this metaphor also goes deeper, penetrating into the structural tissue of the film image, where colorfully printed textiles and luxurious haute couture provide the aesthetic finish to the production design. Esther Leslie weaves the material metaphor proposed here into her text "Dreams for Sale,"[1] uncovering linguistic, practical, physical, and ideological similarities between "material" in its different modalities—as fabulous designer fashion, on the one hand, and film on the other. Analogue film is thus not only a narrative weaving of dreams as a linguistic tapestry of images stitched together in the metaphorical sense; it is also underpinned by the actual industrial and mechanical printing of these images. The "dream factory" can therefore be imagined as a weaving and printing mill, and the stuff of which these cinematic dreams are made is synthetic (color) film stock that is mechanically produced, exposed, dyed, edited, arranged, duplicated, exported, and marketed as a tissue of dreams. These interplays between the dream industries of film and fashion as well as of photography are the subject of this essay: we will begin here with the color fantasies and dreams they share.

High on Modern Dyestuffs

In the 1920s, in particular, color functioned as a key conceptual component of visual attraction. Arriving in the form of colorful consumer goods, this manifested in the Western world as an invasive "color revolution,"[2] extending from the realm of visual arts via the food industry into everyday life. Akin to the new consumer culture, this concept of visual allure took shape as the modern era's color high. The film image was also chromatic, right from its inception in the 1890s: hand-colored

by brush, tinted in a dye bath, later toned using a mordant, applied by a stencil, simulated optically with color filters, and even constructed subtractively.

→ Fig. 1

Photography, as the precursor of film, had a longer history with these color processes, and as early as 1869 hand-colored daguerreotypes were already being superseded by the mimetic (that is, not applied by hand) three-color technique of Louis Ducos du Hauron. The same materials and dyeing techniques are also found in the emerging modern textile industry, where natural plant fabrics, animal fibers, and synthetic materials were bleached, dyed in tubs, printed, and later made into fashion items. The modern dye industry thus represents the main hub connecting these three branches of industry. The synthetic dyestuffs that were primarily used are distinguished in material terms by their particular luminosity, diversity, and low price, which is why consumers tended to abandon the rather expensive traditional natural color pigments. Additionally, these synthetic dyestuffs were particularly well suited for dying animal fibers and the gelatin in photographic and filmic emulsions, which was produced from animal bones. It is therefore no surprise that the standardized color sample charts of Pathé, Agfa, and Kodak are visually similar to the color swatch books of the textile and design industries.[3]

→ Figs. I+II

Intermedial Printing Technologies

In addition to dyestuff, another factor that is common to all three areas is the technology of industrial printing. For example, Pathé's *stencil-based tinting process*, developed in the first decade of the twentieth century, displayed similarities in textural terms not only to the colored photographs of the nineteenth century but also to *stencil*, *silkscreen*, and *rotary* printing: a cinematic stencil comprises a black-and-white copy of a film, on which the objects or figures to be colored are traced in outline frame by frame and stamped out by means of a pantograph. Meanwhile, each color has its own stencil and is applied mechanically to the final film strip with a roller brush, so that only those parts of the film (or textile or photograph) are colored that were *not* covered by the stencil (or roller). This technology thus gives the material a decorative color surface.

→ Fig. 2

Manual or photomechanical *silkscreening* on diverse base materials also uses one screen per color, consisting of a fine-mesh gauze fabric (with photosensitive emulsion) and a covering stencil. A similar

aesthetic effect is produced by cinematic and photographic *screen processes*, in which different patterns of lines or dots in red, blue, and green produce an additive mixture that results in a nearly uniform perception of color:[4] In the lenticular process of Kodacolor, the film even has microscopically small parallel lenses on its surface, which, in combination with polychromatically striped filters, ensure the projection of three-color images. In ESSAI COULEUR DE SONIA DELAUNAY (*Sonia Delaunay's Color Essay*, FRA 1928) by the fashion designer and avant-garde artist of the title, these graphic grid elements become visible as an image structure and, as a visual rhyme, comment on the film's art deco–inspired modernist-cum-cubist costume and color design.

→ Fig. III

Transferring color by means of printing processes is, however, characteristic of the subtractive two-color process of Technicolor No. III. The elevated gelatin reliefs of two film matrices are dyed with complementary colors in order to transfer them successively onto a blank film using rollers and a "pin belt," which results in a dense material aesthetic.[5] This photolithographic stamp principle, in turn, is similar to the *block printing* of textiles and represents an inversion of the stencil concept.

Early Consumer Culture and Media Representations of Textile Luxury Goods

The modernist fashion designs of Sonia Delaunay are characteristic of the liberalizing trends in the fashion of the 1920s that played with the social type of the "modern woman." Colorful prêt-à-porter and industrial beauty products were made available to the public in Paris and New York thanks to mechanization and rationalization processes and were explicitly targeted at middle-class female consumers who were now financially independent. Here, the topoi of fabulous fashions, cosmetics, and feminine identity were closely connected as expressions of social status.[6] In addition to Delaunay, contemporaneous fashion designers such as Paul Poiret, Mariano Fortuny, Madeleine Vionnet, and Coco Chanel also declared war on the traditional corset for women with their visionary haute couture designs. Meanwhile, fashion magazines of the time, such as the *Gazette du Bon Ton* in France or *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* in the United States, reported on these famous designer dreams in the 1920s, although their stencil-colored fashion illustrations were soon replaced by fashion campaigns in natural colors by famous fashion and star photographers such as Erwin Blumenfeld and Horst P. Horst.

→ Fig. IV

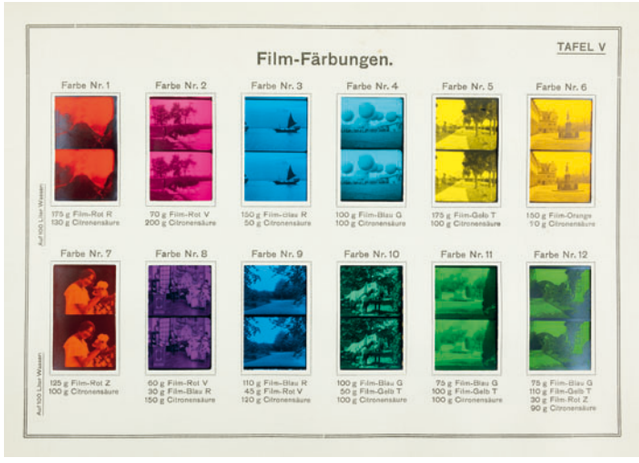

Fig. I *Agfa Filmfärbungen*, *plate V*, ca. 1925. Cardboard frame with tinted nitrate film frames. Reproduction from *Agfa Kine-Handbuch*, Berlin: Actien-Gesellschaft für Anilin-Fabrikation, ca. 1925. Photo: Barbara Flueckiger

Fig. II *Baumwolle Mustertafel*, *plate 9*, 1901. Colored swatch and cotton sample on cardboard. Reproduction from *Die Anilinfarben der Badischen Anilin-& Soda-Fabrik Ludwigshafen am Rhein und ihre Anwendung auf Wolle, Baumwolle, Seide und sonstigen Textilfasern*, French edition, Ludwigshafen: BASF, 1901. Photo: Barbara Flueckiger

Fig. III ESSAI COULEUR DE SONIA DELAUNAY (Sonia Delaunay, FRA 1928). Screenshot of the Lobster Films DVD LES PREMIERS PAS DU CINEMA, 2006.

Fig. IV Georges Lepape, *Les Choses de Paul Poiret*, 1911. Stencil-colored fashion illustration, 34 × 31 cm. Reproduction from Jean-Paul Bouillon, Paul-Louis Rinuy, and Antoine Baudin, *L'Art du XXe siècle, vol. 1, 1900–1939*, Paris: Citadelles & Mazenod, 1996.

→ Fig. 3

→ Fig. 4

→ Fig. 5

The star system of the dream factory and the character of the femme fatale and her glamorous wardrobe are additional examples of these media representations of gender-coded luxury goods and bodies. The ostentatious demonstration of designer opulence in fabrics and colors as a visual spectacle can, however, ultimately be traced back to the first fashion films in color: from the hand-colored and tinted films that appeared around 1900 through the two-color fashion shows in Kinemacolor around 1912 and detailed stencil colorings in delicate pastel shades by Pathé and Gaumont all the way to the dense, saturated two-color splendor of trendy fashion designs in Kodachrome Two-Color and Technicolor No. III in the 1920s, presented by contemporaneous white icons of beauty in classy interiors and exteriors.

From glittering sequins, fleecy chiffon, and furs by way of shiny silk to splendid brocade, colorful embroideries, and prints—an appreciation of expensive materials, along with their colors, cuts, textures, and patterns, is particularly evident in the medium of film, where we find magnificent fabrics not only flaunted on the bodies of women in motion but also enlarged in close-up to many times their original size, their optical, haptic, and chromatic qualities intended to further excite the consumerist desires of female viewers.[7] Consequently, the use of color processes can also be seen as a strategy for enhancing the material and adding a touch of nobility to the cinematic medium. Not only did color fashion films therefore represent an attempt to bridge the gap between (supposedly) high and low art by bringing luxurious haute couture to the feminine masses via popular cinema, they also mirrored the cultural zeitgeist and the contemporary (color) film industry, whose materials, technologies, and aesthetics were loosely interwoven here with the photography and fashion industry.

1. Esther Leslie, “Dreams for Sale,” in *Birds of Paradise: Costume as Cinematic Spectacle*, ed. Marketa Uhlirova, London: Koenig Books, 2013, 29–40.

2. Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *The Color Revolution*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012.

3. Jelena Rakin, “Lust an der Palette: Serielle Farbflächen und die visuelle Dramaturgie von Kompositionsbildern im vorklassischen Stummfilm,” in *Film, Bild, Kunst: Visuelle Ästhetik des vorklassischen Stummfilms*, ed. Jörg Schweinitz and Daniel Wiegand, Marburg: Schüren, 2016, 233–50.

4. This refers to a hybrid form involving black-and-white emulsion combined with color filters. Additive mimetic processes in photography may rely, for example, on light passing through a special filter screen printed with vertical stripes of color as a means to view the glass-plate positive (the Joly process) or on random mosaic structures (Autochrome Lumière); they are even evidenced in isolated experiments on photographic paper or aluminum foil (McDonough, Paget, and Piller). See Sylvie Pénichon, *Twentieth Century Colour Photographs: The Complete Guide to Processes, Identification & Preservation*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2013, 20–54. See also Thilo Koenig’s text in this volume, “(In)Visible Color: Plea for a History of Color Photography,” 51–70.

5. See Barbara Flueckiger’s text in this volume, “Film Colors: Materiality, Technology, Aesthetics,” 17–49.

6. See Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003.

7. See Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, “Symptoms of Desire: Colour, Costume, and Commodities in Fashion Newsreels of the 1910s and 1920s,” in *Film History* 21, no. 2 (2009), 107–21.

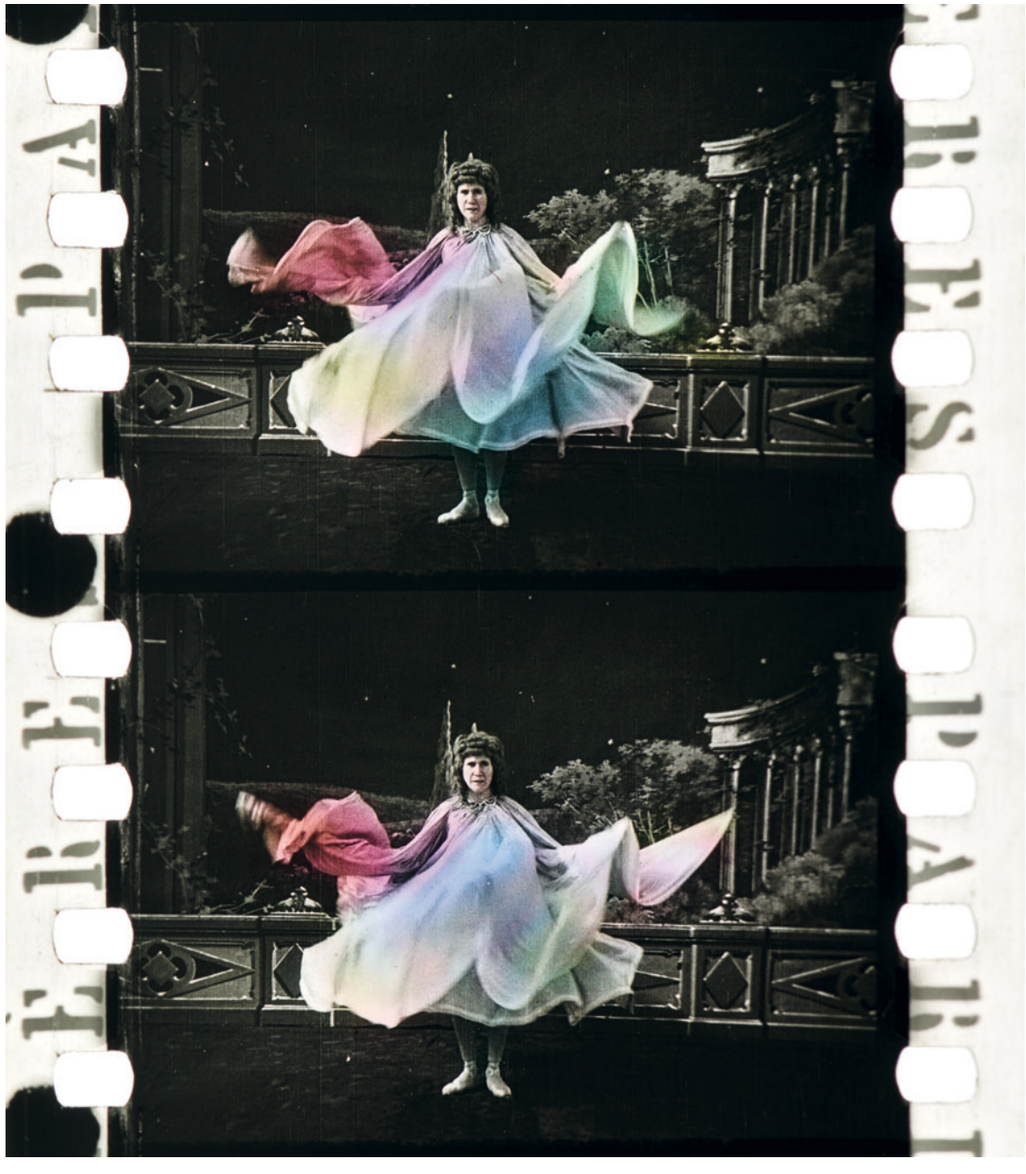

Fig. 1 Serpentine Dance by Loïe Fuller. LOÏE FULLER (Anonymous, FRA 1905). Hand-colored nitrate film, 35 mm. Credit: BFI National Archive. Photo: Olivia Kristina Stutz

Fig. 2 HONGARIJE (Anonymous, FRA 1926). Stencil-colored nitrate film, 35 mm. Credit: EYE Filmmuseum. Photo: Olivia Kristina Stutz
Fig. 3 DE MODE DER TASCHJES TE PARIJS (Anonymous, FRA 1924). Stencil-colored nitrate film, 35 mm. Credit: EYE Filmmuseum. Photo: Olivia Kristina Stutz

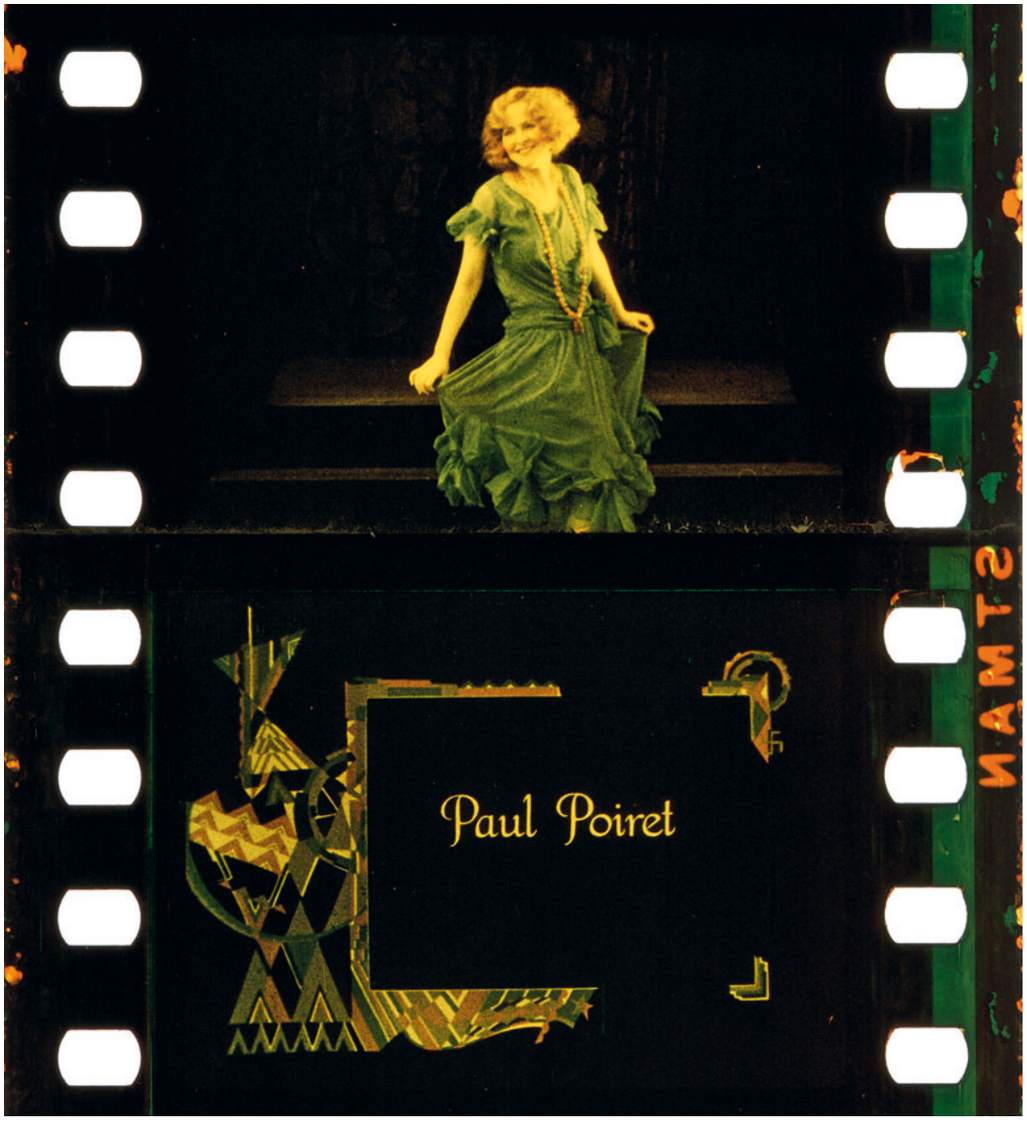

Fig. 4 PARISIAN MODES IN COLOUR (Anonymous, USA 1926).
Kodachrome Two-Color, nitrate film, 35 mm. Credit: EYE Filmmuseum.
Photo: Olivia Kristina Stutz
Fig. 5 FASHION NEWS (Anonymous, USA 1927). Technicolor
No. III, dye-transfer print, nitrate film, 35 mm.
Credit: UCLA Film & Television Archive. Photo: Barbara Flueckiger